

9 January 2008
Evening Prayer (Eph 1: One Year Series)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“Exactly Where He is to Be”

Text: Luke 2:40-52 (1 Kings 8:6-13; Romans 12:1-5)

Parents: imagine raising the perfect child. One who never talked back, never slammed doors, always did his chores, was always respectful and obedient. Sound like a dream? Perhaps. But so it was in Nazareth, and the household of Mary and Joseph. Raising the incarnate Son of God, who did not sin, ever. Who was perfect, always and in all things. Who was always where He was supposed to be, always did what He was supposed to do, and always said what He was supposed to say.

And so I think it understandable that Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was where He was supposed to be, doing what He was supposed to be doing – in the company of those returning to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. For Jesus was always where He was supposed to be, and doing what He was supposed to be doing. Always. If there was one person you could count on, it was Jesus.

Except this time. At the end of their day’s journey, He was not there. And as any parent who has lost a child for any length of time can tell you, only one thing filled their mind at that point: panic. Sheer terror. Something was wrong, and absolutely nothing matters at that point except finding your child. And so it was with Mary and Joseph. They return to Jerusalem and search for Him, consumed with this for three days.

The thing is . . . Jesus was not lost. As always, He was where He was supposed to be, and doing what He was supposed to be doing: in His Father’s house, doing His Father’s work. For just as *the glory cloud of the Lord’s presence filled Solomon’s Temple*, so now the glory of the Lord’s presence had come to the Temple, beclouded in the flesh and blood of Jesus. God had come to dwell with His people. To serve them with His very life. To teach them – which is what Jesus was doing with the teachers. He wasn’t asking questions to learn from them, but to teach them. Leading them into the wisdom of God and His Word through His questions. Directing them to the promises of God, that they would one day see in Him the fulfillment of those

promises. Yes, Jesus was doing exactly what He was supposed to be doing.

And so it was not something wrong happening in Jerusalem that day, but something **very right**. Mary and Joseph did not understand because their minds were filled with panic and terror, leaving no room for anything else. Their minds were clouded with sin, which is probably why it took them **three days** to find Jesus – the Temple, apparently, being the last place they thought to look. Only Jesus could clear their minds and give them peace.

And so it is for you and me. What is it that fills your mind? What sins, what panic and terrors, that leave room for nothing else? Perhaps like Mary and Joseph it is family troubles. Maybe it is your job, or the fears that come with getting older, or being left alone. These things and many more fill our minds and cloud our thinking, so that maybe we even think there's something wrong with Jesus – that's He's not doing what He should be doing for me, or for our church, or for the world. For where is He? Where is He?

But is the problem with Jesus, or with us? Is the problem His wrong ways, or our wrong thinking? Can we not count on Jesus? To keep His Word and fulfill His promises to us?

Indeed we can. For all the Scriptures are fulfilled in Him. The Law of Moses in the ark of God has been replaced with the grace and mercy of God in the ark of Jesus' body and blood. His grace and mercy that not only compelled Him at Christmas to become man, but compelled Him to ascend the cross and be the atonement for not only our sin, but for the sin of the world. That after **three days** in the tomb, we would find Him *exactly where He has promised to be for us*: coming to us and serving us with His life and forgiveness in His Church, through Holy Gospel, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. And through these means, Jesus clears the fog that clouds our thinking, cleans the guilt and sin that burdens our hearts, and gives us peace. The peace that only He can give. The peace that we need so much.

That peace is why St. Paul could write what we heard this evening from Romans when he says: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*. That is the transformation that only takes place when we are taken into Christ and our minds filled by Him and His peace. When in Holy Baptism we are forgiven our sin, and joined to Christ. When in Holy Communion we are filled with Christ and fed by His body and blood. And when the wisdom of His Holy Word and the

declaration of His forgiveness raise us to new life in Him. And the right-ness, the righteousness of God, is given to us, transforming our wrong-headedness, and renewing us, reconciling us to God.

And so just as *Jesus was submissive and obedient to His parents*, so we too can now offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Not seeing our submission and service to others as something bad or to be avoided – but as a return to the glorious and perfect service of Eden. A joyful and loving service. A Christ-like service, as God in Christ came to serve us, and set us free. For we who once were lost in sin have now been found. We who once were dead have been made alive. All our wrongness made right in Him, who is the Light of the world, now risen upon us.

Now to Him who dwells with us and is our peace, to Him (+) with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all glory, honor, and worship, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.